

Message Text

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ACTION OPR-02

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 212

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE GUATEMALA 1148

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ALLOW, GT

SUBJECT: REQUEST OF REINSTATEMENT OF POST DIFFERENTIAL

1. POST REQUESTS IMMEDIATE REINSTATEMENT OF POST DIFFERENTIAL
BASED ON FOLLOWING FACTORS RELATED TO FEBRUARY 4 EARTHQUAKE
AND CONTINUING SUBSEQUENT TREMORS.

A. POST IS IN AN EARTHQUAKE ZONE, AND HAS SUFFERED FROM
ONE OF 7.2 RICHTER ON FEBRUARY 4 (GUATEMALA 0804) AND ONE OF
7.2 RICHTER ON FEBRUARY 6 (GUATEMALA 0825) MORE RECENTLY
ESTIMATED BY AMERICAN GEOLOGISTS HERE AS BETWEEN 5.75 AND 6.
IN ADDITION, ACCORDING TO NATIONAL OBSERVATORY THERE HAVE
BEEN 730 TREMORS OF LESSOR INTENSITY SINCE INITIAL
QUAKE. SEISMOLOGISTS HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO PREDICT WITH
ANY CONFIDENCE WHEN TREMORS WILL CEASE, OR WHEN THE DANGER
OF ANOTHER SERIOUS EARTHQUAKE WILL SUBSIDE.

B. TO DATE 995 PERSONS HAVE BEEN KILLED IN GUATEMALA CITY,
WHERE MISSION IS LOCATED, AS THE RESULT OF THE FEBRUARY 4
AND 6 QUAKE (ALMOST ALL FROM THE FORMER).

C. SEVERAL MISSION AMERICAN EMPLOYEES HAVE HAD HOMES SO SEVERELY
DAMAGED THAT CONTINUED OCCUPANCY IS UNSAFE AND HAVE HAD
TO MOVE.

D. HOUSING MARKET IS FLOODED BY EVACUEES FROM DAMAGED
HOMES. OVER 40 MISSION EMPLOYEES ARE SHARING LIVING
ACCOMMODATIONS WITH OTHER MISSION PERSONNEL, PCV/S OR
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PRIVATE AMERICANS.

E. EVERY FAMILY IN THE MISSION HAS LOST SOME OF HIS PERSONAL EFFECTS THROUGH BREAKAGE CAUSED BY THE EARTHQUAKE.

F. BECAUSE OF CONTINUING TREMORS OF VARYING INTENSITY MANY OTHER MISSION EMPLOYEES ARE SLEEPING IN CARS OR IN THE YARD FOR FEAR OF SLEEPING IN THEIR HOUSES.

G. THERE HAS BEEN A DISASTER OF MAJOR PROPORTIONS WITH OVER A MILLION HOMELESS IN THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE, 289,000 IN GUATEMALA CITY ITSELF. A MASSIVE INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN OF RECONSTRUCTION AND REHABILITATION WILL BE NECESSARY BEFORE THE CITY AND COUNTRY RETURNS TO NORMALCY.

H. ALL SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN CLOSED SINCE FEBRUARY 4 AND TWO MINISTRIES (EDUCATION AND PUBLIC WORKS) ARE IN DISAGREEMENT OVER WHAT SAFETY REQUIREMENTS ARE TO BE MET AND WHO IS TO DECIDE WHEN THEY ARE MET. ALL SCHOOLS WILL BE CLOSED FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE AND ONE FAMILY HAS ALREADY ELECTED TO SEND THEIR CHILDREN BACK TO THE U.S. FOR SCHOOLING.

I. ABOUT 15 PER CENT OF MISSION HOUSING IS WITHOUT RUNNING WATER OF ANY KIND.

J. DUE TO THE MANY BREAKS IN THE WATER LINE, THE EFFECT OF THE CHLORINE IN THE WATER IS LOST AFTER IT HAS TRAVELED 200 FEET IN THE PIPES. THE TAP WATER IS CONTAMINATED. BOTTLED WATER IS IN VERY SCARCE SUPPLY, PRACTICALLY UNOBTAINABLE AND THEN ONLY FROM THE FACTORY WITH THE RETURN OF THE EMPTY BOTTLE.

K. ARMED ROBBER BANDS ARE PRESENT IN POORER SECTIONS OF TOWN, ALTHOUGH NOT YET IN THE MORE PROSPEROUS SUBURBS. NEVERTHELESS, ARMED VIGILANTE GROUPS HAVE BEEN FORMED THROUGHOUT THE CITY, EVEN IN THE MOST AFFLUENT OF NEIGHBORHOODS. THESE VIGILANTE GROUPS CREATE AN ADDITIONAL HAZARD BECAUSE OF THEIR PROPENSITY TO SHOOT IN THE AIR TO FREIGHTEN OFF THIEVES.

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L. MEDICAL FACILITIES ARE OVERLOADED WITH CASUALTIES WITH THE RESULT THAT SOME TYPES OF MEDICAL TREATMENT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN POSSIBLY NECESSITATING THE PATIENT'S EVACUATION.

M. MANY FOOD ITEMS ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY OR DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN, SUCH AS BREAD, BECAUSE BAKERY OVENS WERE CRACKED.

N. GASOLINE IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN SOME AREAS OF THE COUNTRY,
AND SEVERAL MAJOR HIGHWAYS ARE BLOCKED. FROM THREE TO SIX
MONTHS WILL BE REQUIRED TO CLEAR THE ROADS.

2. SINCE TREMORS ARE CONTINUING AND THERE IS NO PROJECTION
WHEN THEY MAY STOP, AND BECAUSE THE HARDSHIPS LISTED ABOVE
WILL CONTINUE INDEFINITELY, THE POST FEELS A HARDSHIP
DIFFERENTIAL IS MERITED.
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